

**reSTART: 7. Mission**  
**Matthew 16:13-16 and 28:16-20**  
**October 22, 2017**  
**Pastor Tami Luckhardt**

We began this series seven weeks ago with a video of Pastor Steve on a golf course, attempting to reStart his love of the game. Well if you're expecting a golf story from me, you're going to be disappointed. Much to my father's dismay, I've never played a round of golf in my life but I do have a story I can share with you about a reSTART in my life. When I was in college, I took up running. My husband calls it jogging. He's probably right. I'm not very fast and I was never in it to win races. I ran for the benefits that I received in my own physical and mental wellbeing. But, do you know what I discovered pretty early on? Running is boring! For me, it was as much a mind game as it was a physical challenge. I'm not going to tell you the date but this was before cell phones. I tried running with a transistor radio a couple of times but even a small radio was still pretty big. And the antenna, I almost put my eye out! So after a couple of years I gave it up.

In 2005, I started walking in the Susan G Komen Breast Cancer 3 Day walks. Are you familiar with these walks? My friends and I would train all summer long so that we could walk 60 miles in 3 days to raise money and awareness for Breast Cancer research. We were committed walkers. In fact, we had a rule...NO RUNNING ALLOWED! We even pinky swore, do you know about pinky swears, that we would never run, not even if we were crossing the street and the light was turning red! Well, after walking in eight 3-Day Walks, my friend Dawn and I decided we needed a new challenge so we decided to try running. Since neither one of us knew what we were doing, we looked for training tool to help us. We found a podcast called Couch to 5K. It's a 9 week/3 days a week, 30 minute/day training program that moves you from your couch to running your very first 5K. A British woman named Laura who has a lovely, soothing voice, is the narrator. And the first week begins with just a couple rounds of 60 seconds of running, cushioned by several minutes of walking on either side. It's not just intent on getting you to running a 5K, it has been specifically designed to instill a love of running. Laura provides instruction, encouragement and affirmation at each new level of achievement. It also helped me to know that I had an actual running partner who was counting on me to meet her on the corner at the agreed upon time for our next session. It was a place to reSTART my running. And while I am still not sure that I love running, I do love chocolate and I can definitely say I've developed a deep appreciation of the benefits of running.

That's what we have been hoping this series could do for you and your faith because everything has a starting point, including faith. Most of us learned about faith as children, but as we grew up – we experienced more of the challenging, heartbreaking sides of life. We now had questions where our childhood faith was no longer enough. Some even walked away from faith entirely. This has been series that looked for a new starting point of our faith. Today in our final message of this series, we hear Jesus' final instruction to his followers from the gospel of Matthew about what to do with that faith: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

We, like the first disciples, have been invited to be part of a movement, the greatest movement in human history. This movement, the church, has not always got it right, but

because it was built on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, ultimately nothing will stop it. Despite all efforts to squash that movement, it would spread over all the world and outlast even the mighty Roman Empire, the empire that crucified Jesus and killed the disciples. But now, two thousand years later, where do we see the Roman Empire? Only in history books and at archeological sites, while the Church of Jesus Christ continues to move forward. The church is the hope of the world because the church is the vehicle by which God is bringing the solutions to the greatest problems facing humanity. And we are invited to be part of this movement. In this passage, Jesus invites us to participate in the multi-ethnic, multi-national, unstoppable activity of God on earth. The foundation of this movement is not a truth claim, something that claims to be true without evidence, but rather it is an event (Jesus' resurrection) that resulted in a promise (to be with us always) – a promise that has been kept. Jesus said, "I am with you always" to the very end of the age. And he also said, where two or more are gathered in my name, so will I be also. So what is it about the being gathered together? Something happens when Christians come together and become the church, a holy assembly of the people of Jesus, infused with the power of the Holy Spirit, that when gathered together, Christ works through us in ways we cannot alone.

You may remember the word used for church in the New Testament is "ekklesia". It comes from 2 Greek words – ekk and kaleo. "Ekk" means "set apart" and kaleo means, "called". So the church is a group of people set apart from ordinary life and called for a purpose bigger than anyone of us can achieve by ourselves. This movement began around an event, Jesus' resurrection, and it lasted for about two years, but then persecution began and the movement stopped. And 20 years later, when the movement needed a new leader, God chose perhaps the most unlikely leader, Saul. It was well known throughout the region that Saul was the chief enemy, main persecutor of Christians. He was a highly educated man and he truly believed that Christians were a credible threat to Judaism. He hated Christians so much so that his mission in life was to persecute them without mercy. He was so determined to persecute the first followers that he even pursued women as well as men. So what was God thinking when he chose Saul?

On his journey to Damascus to capture Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem, God stopped Saul in his tracks and he had a personal encounter with the Risen Christ. A light from heaven flashed around him and he instantly fell to the ground. Now blind, he was lying there, completely helpless in the dust and dirt of the road. He was instantly transformed from the threatening, powerful persecutor to a pitiful, shell of a man, in profound need of help. Can you see God at work here? The living Christ was not simply intervening to protect the apostles in Damascus but the voice that Saul heard said, "Saul why do you persecute me?" We know now that God had big plans for Saul and for this fledgling church. With God, the picture is always big and each one of us, like Saul, is a precious part of it. So being blinded by the light, with the help of his assistants, Saul was sent into the city to wait. And after waiting on the Spirit he was given new eyes of faith, and new eyes of the heart, so to see those he once hated in a new light. It was through baptism that he became a member of this new community of faith. Saul, now re-named Paul, was able to see himself through the eyes of Christ for the first time. And he was able to see Christians and Gentiles – Greeks, Romans, Syrians, people not so different from you and me – in a new light. Paul being filled with the light of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, had his eyes opened to "a new identity, a new community, a new ekklesia, and a new way of being." So to us Paul is the example of how to open our eyes to the wonder and possibilities of a life in Christ.

Perhaps the most dramatic sign of Paul's conversion was his passionate commitment to now share the gospel with the Gentiles. Paul's conversion wasn't from one religion to another but instead a total change of heart and mind that converted him from passionately, even violently at times, opposing the inclusion of Gentiles to becoming instead the greatest proponent of including them. Paul devoted the rest of his life to establishing and nurturing churches rather than focusing on the conversion of individual people because he knew the power of community. So Paul went from being the greatest threat to Christians to being the greatest champion of the Church of Jesus Christ. And what happened to Paul? He was arrested, beaten, and thrown into prison in Rome and was eventually beheaded for his beliefs. Was it worth it? If we could go back and talk with Paul and tell him who we are today would he say it was worth it? I believe he would. Matthew 16 says that nothing will stop the church. And today, there are many who believe the church has ceased to be useful, with our numbers declining, churches closing. But if the church is of God can anything stop it. Last week, we re-introduced our Breakthrough Prayer in an effort to restart or recalibrate our life as Messiah church. We passed out bracelets and prayer cards in the hopes that you would set your alarms to 7:45 am/pm and begin again to pray this prayer together. Last Monday morning, I was out walking our dog, Carson, when my Breakthrough Prayer alarm went off. So I stopped beside a beautiful pond near our house, and with the sun just above the horizon, I prayed the prayer. And I thought of you all, the church, my ekklesia. We are a group of people called out, and set apart to do life together. Christianity is not a solitary sport. It is a team sport and we are the team. We can do so much more together than we can as individuals.

Have you personally seen any results of praying this breakthrough prayer? I think sometimes unless the changes are big and bold and obvious, like a tidal wave rolling over us, we can easily dismiss or miss them completely. So I want to share a story with you this morning of a breakthrough, one that you're probably not even aware of. Take a look: (video here) Did you know about that you did that? That's the beauty of ekklesia. And while it may appear to be small or completely unnoticeable to us, it's huge in the life of my friend Carrie. And who knows how many other life-changing stories – similar to this are out there? When Jesus says, GO and make disciples, it simply means to GO and live your life, as a disciple of Christ. Through our faith, we allow God to do the engineering. That is exactly what you did for Carrie.

On the last Saturday in August, we presented our first Launch seminar here at Messiah Church. LAUNCH is a 3.5-hour seminar designed to help you reflect on how God has uniquely created you and prepared you to serve. After the seminar, participants were assigned a coach who continues to help him or her develop their God dream. And folks, we have some amazing stories coming out of that first LAUNCH. This week in your mail, you will be receiving an update from your Servant Steering Team. In it, you will find a story about a Messiah member named Maria, and how she is diving head first into her God dream. I hope you'll read it. This morning I want to share another God dream story with you. It comes from Messiah members, Lee Stagni and his daughter, Melissa. Let's watch: (video here) Pretty amazing dream, right? Just last week, Lee and Melissa received word that they did not win Chip's dream come true contest. But, that does not mean that their dream died. Absolutely not! Their dream lives on and it will be exciting to see how God works in their life. Lee and Melissa, thank you for allowing me to share your story.

So let me leave you with a question. During this series, have you been able to restart your faith? Have you thought about how can you use your strengths, weaknesses, and experiences to draw others closer to Christ? What will be your next step for engaging more fully in the mission of the church? Maybe it's by serving on a team here at church or on our Make a Difference Day event this weekend. Perhaps it's increasing your giving or maybe taking that first step into giving? Or inviting a friend to worship? Or maybe you'd consider being a reading buddy across the street at Oakwood Elementary School. Or maybe you can take a walk with a neighbor who needs a friend to listen. What is it that you can you give your life to?

Paul challenges us to live lives worthy of the calling we have received, the awesome privilege of being called Christ's very own. He reminds us that our mission is to, "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." Each person is uniquely and wonderfully made with individual gifts and passions and to each of us grace has been given by Christ. Different gifts and viewpoints add to the beauty of the Body of Christ. When we focus on how our differences can bless us instead of how they can divide us, then we begin to live into this idea of ekklesia. Like Paul, we are sent, to GO and share with others the love of God in Christ. Jesus said, "Come with me and then GO to those you used to see as strangers – GO even to those you have seen as enemies. GO in my name. If you do, your eyes will be opened again and again."

### **Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of October 22, 2017**

**Weekly Prayer:** God of grace, I come with all I have; body, soul, and mind, to offer you my prayer and praise. I long for a glimpse of your kingdom of kindness-- a world where love rules over all. A world where enemies embrace and distinctions between friend and foe evaporate in the light of your love. I cannot live without you. I adore you and dedicate my life to you again today. Amen.

### **Monday, October 23**

#### **Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20**

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

**Observation:** Jesus had been crucified, died and was buried. Here, the disciples were gathered together on a mountain in Galilee and as far as they knew, everything they believed had ended. But Jesus appeared to them one last time before ascending into heaven. In this passage, known as the Great Commission, Jesus, with all the authority of heaven given to him, tells them to go and make disciples in his name.

**Application:** When someone is dying or leaving, their parting words are powerful. We pay attention to last words. Jesus' last words tell us that we are to go and make disciples in all the world. "Go" is the key word here! "Therefore, GO." Go simply means to live. It is his authority that establishes and empowers your going. Are you able to get out of the way and allow God to engineer your going?

**Prayer:** Loving God, I offer my life to you. Help me to walk in your way. Make me the person you want me to be so that others will come to know your grace, power and love. Amen.

## **Tuesday, October 24**

### **Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 17-20**

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

**Observation:** Paul wrote these words of encouragement to the church in Corinth. Everything Paul did was to honor God. Christ's love controlled his life. Like Paul, we should not live to please ourselves but instead spend our lives pleasing God. The Holy Spirit gives us new life and we are never the same, just like Paul after his conversion. We are not re-formed, re-started, re-habilitated or re-educated but completely re-created in Christ.

**Application:** God brings us back to himself by blotting out our sins and making us a new creation. When we trust Christ, we are no longer strangers or foreigners to God. Because God reconciles us, we too are called to the ministry of reconciliation. Is there someone in your life today who needs to hear that they are loved and cared for by you?

**Prayer:** Loving God, open my eyes and my heart. Let me look around and ask, "Who might need me right now?" Allow me to be still so you can reveal the answer to me. Then help me to know how I might be a blessing to them. Amen.

## **Wednesday, October 25**

### **Scripture: Matthew 16:13-18**

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

**Observation:** The city of Caesarea of Philippi was located several miles north of the Sea of Galilee, in the territory ruled by Phillip. The Gentile influences of the Greek and Roman empires were everywhere but the rock (Peter) on which Jesus would build His church has now been identified. Peter had faith and believed that Jesus was the Messiah!

**Application:** Do you find that you have opportunities to share your faith with others? Do you wear a Breakthrough Prayer bracelet? This may be a conversation starter, and if asked, who do you say that Jesus is? All believers are joined into the church by their faith in Jesus Christ, the same faith that Peter expressed here. And Jesus praised Peter for his confession of faith. This, this is a faith on which I can build my church!

**Prayer:** God, I make myself available to you, to be used boldly and without measure, so to reach new people and help to heal a broken world. Amen.

#### **Thursday, October 26**

##### **Scripture: Acts 9:11-18**

The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.” “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.” But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

**Observation:** Ananias was terrified of Saul and for good reason. He had the reputation of being the chief persecutor of Christians. But despite these understandable feelings of fear, Ananias obeyed God and ministered to Saul. We must do the same and not limit God by our fear. We must have faith and follow God’s leading, even when we are led to difficult people and challenging places.

**Application:** When praying the Breakthrough Prayer, do you have faith that the Holy Spirit *will* break through and change Messiah Church and are you willing to let the Holy Spirit breakthrough in *your* life? If so, are you ready to release your fears and follow wherever God may lead? The next verse of that prayer is “create in me a joyful heart for all that You are doing in and through Messiah Church to change lives and transform the world.” This means that as followers of Jesus Christ, we may need to give up what we want/prefer so that others can get what they need, a relationship with Jesus.

**Prayer:** Loving God, when I feel you nudging me toward difficult people or uncomfortable places, remind me to place my trust in you and in the power of your Holy Spirit. Like Ananias, today I release all of my fears and desires to you because I have faith that I can do all things through You who gives me strength. Amen.

#### **Friday, October 27**

##### **Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11**

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of

them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

**Observation:** The spiritual gifts given to each person by the Holy Spirit are special abilities that are to be used to care for the needs of others. There are many gifts and people have different gifts and all gifts come from the Holy Spirit. Their purpose is to build up the body of Christ, the church.

**Application:** How can you step more fully into this movement called the church? How can you use your gifts to draw others closer to Christ? Maybe you can serve on a team. Perhaps you will consider taking a step towards growing in your giving or maybe you will invite someone into worship at Messiah Church. What will you do to carry the hope of the world?

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, use me, I pray. Take whatever gifts and talents you have given to me and use them to share the love of Jesus with the world. Amen.

## **Saturday, October 28**

### **Scripture: Acts 1:1-8**

In my former book, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

**Observation:** During these forty days, the church of Jesus Christ was established. Those teaching the gospel were ordinary humans, with limitations and frailties, the same as you and me. But by the power of the Holy Spirit, they were empowered to take Good News all over the world.

**Application:** Look at the difference Jesus' resurrection made in the lives of his disciples. Immediately after his death, they were scattered, disillusioned and fearful for their lives. After seeing the Risen Christ, they were fearless and risked everything to spread the Good News around the world. Can you find confidence in their testimony twenty-one centuries later?

**Prayer:** O Lord, the world and all that is in it belongs to you. Let us each give praise to your glory and give thanks each day for the kingdom you have established among your people, a kingdom unlike the ones of this earth that fade and fall but a heavenly and everlasting kingdom that endures through the ages. Amen.